

**MINUTES OF POLICE AND FIRE COMMISSION
MEETING OF JULY 21, 2022**

4:00 p.m.

Council Chambers (203 South Farwell Street)

MEMBERS PRESENT: Daniel Kincaid, Stephanie Finn, Disa Wahlstrand, Kimberly Cronk

MEMBERS ABSENT: Selika Ducksworth-Lawton

STAFF PRESENT: Police Chief Matt Rokus
Fire Chief Chris Bell
Battalion Chief Joe Kelly
Deputy Chief Jon Schultz
Deputy Fire Chief Al Bertrang
Human Resources Director Victoria Seltun

OTHERS PRESENT: Colleen Schian
Anthony Hennings
Firefighter Grant Hansen
Engineer Kevin Blaine

The Commission convened in open session at 4:01 p.m. Meeting was called to order by President Kincaid. President Kincaid asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the Police and Fire Commission meeting held on May 19th. No corrections or additions were noted, and the minutes stand approved as circulated.

Chief Rokus provided a personnel update. There have been no new hires or separations since the previous meeting. There is one candidate still under consideration from the previous eligibility list. There are currently three vacancies right now. However, there are five anticipated retirements before the end of the year.

Chief Rokus and Chief Bell gave a presentation titled “Workload Analysis and Potential Referendum.” A survey given to City of Eau Claire residents by Baker Tilly was discussed. Within the survey, it was found that residents strongly support, and have a high satisfaction rate, with police and fire services. Support for the referendum increased from 34.9% to 54% once residents were informed how the funds would be allocated.

Chief Rokus discussed the service capacity of the Eau Claire Police Department in this presentation. Currently, the 99 sworn officers include supervisors, investigators, and patrol officers. This is much lower than other similarly-sized cities. Because of this, policing strategies have been implemented in order to determine where to allocate available resources in order to stabilize response times. Obligated and unobligated time was also discussed. Currently, the recommended national average of obligated time, which is time spent responding to calls,

investigating crimes, etc., is 35-40% of an officer's time. The Eau Claire Police Department is currently at about 60% obligated time, completely backwards from what it should be. This limits their ability to perform other tasks, such as crisis management, and working with the mental health co-response coordinator. It also has required the Department to prioritize what crimes are followed up on and stop providing services that are deemed less essential. Officers have also seen a 97% increase in mandatory overtime to meet staffing needs, while some detectives have been reassigned to patrol shifts. Not only does this take away from time investigating crimes, but it decreases employee well-being and retention. Chief Rokus stated that he has asked for 10 new positions, but expects five positions to be able to be realistically funded by the referendum.

Chief Bell continued the presentation to discuss the staffing needs of the Eau Claire Fire Department and the potential referendum. The number of EMS calls have increased, while staffing of the department has decreased. Approximately 10,000 calls are received per year, up from 3,000 in 2005. Currently, there are 97 employees in the department. This is the same staffing level that existed in 1989, while the volume of calls has increased more than three times. Chief Bell is requesting six Firefighter/Paramedics be added to the referendum, but expects only five to be funded.

President Kincaid asked if there were any questions regarding the presentation. Commissioner Cronk asked about crime clearance and a discussion was held. President Kincaid asked Chief Rokus and Chief Bell if the referendum will take place in the fall of 2022. It was noted that the School Board has not formally made the decision to add their referendum at this time, but City Council has formally decided it will be on the ballot. However, final numbers have not been decided.

Chief Bell proposed a change to the current Firefighter eligibility list process. He recommended moving to a 12-month rolling eligibility list, instead of having one yearly eligibility list. The eligibility requirements would remain the same. Commissioner Wahlstrand asks what the downside is. Chief Bell states he does not believe there is a downside, but acknowledges that it is not a perfect solution to retain candidates. Commissioner Wahlstrand made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Finn, and passed unanimously, to approve the process of a 12-month rolling Firefighter eligibility list.

Chief Bell provided a personnel update. The department has seen one retirement and no separations since the last PFC meeting. There are currently four vacancies. Chief Bell recommended Anthony Hennings for Fire Captain. Commissioner Cronk made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Wahlstrand, and passed unanimously, to approve the promotion of Anthony Hennings to Fire Captain.

Chief Bell also provided an operational update. The upgrade of Station 6 is taking longer than expected due to material acquisition. The renovation is expected to go into 2023. A discussion was held regarding the increased frequency of river rescue calls. A rescue had taken place

within the last week that went well and only resulted in minor injuries of those rescued and one firefighter. President Kincaid asked if there were any questions for Chief Bell, none were noted.

President Kincaid asked if there are any future agenda items. Commissioner Cronk asked about the possibility of holding a public comment period at future PFC meetings. A discussion was held and it was noted this would be a future agenda item. A discussion was also held on the future timing of interviews when held in conjunction with regular PFC meetings.

Chief Bell provided a brief overview of the Firefighter interview process.

At 4:57 p.m., a motion was made by Commissioner Cronk, seconded by Commissioner Wahlstrand, and passed by unanimous roll call vote to go into closed session to conduct interviews of Firefighter candidates.

At 7:11 p.m., motion was made by Commissioner Finn, seconded by Commissioner Wahlstrand and passed unanimously to move into open session.

Based on the discussion held and interviews conducted in closed session, a Firefighter eligibility list was created. Motion was made by Commissioner Cronk, seconded by Commissioner Finn, and passed unanimously, to adopt the new eligibility list, which shall be valid for 12 months.

Motion was made by Commissioner Wahlstrand to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Cronk and the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

The next regularly-scheduled Police and Fire Commission meeting is September 15th, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Kelsey Dittloff, Police and Fire Commission Secretary.